

Media Policy

Public Health - Seattle & King County

Revised February 22, 2000

Policy

The Communications Manager (or designee) receives, assesses, and responds to or triages all calls/contacts to Public Health - Seattle & King County from reporters or other media representatives. Other Public Health staff contacted directly by reporters or other media representatives should refer them to the Communication Manager (or designee) *before* responding to their questions.

Rationale

Public Health-Seattle & King County has a strong interest in regular and favorable media coverage of public health issues. Using the media is one of the most effective and efficient methods of public health education. Messages that go out in the media reach enormous numbers of people, are timely, and are generally free of charge. Both during a crisis and in our daily work of disease prevention and health promotion, there are few better ways to inform great numbers of people than through stories in the mass media.

Reporters are our allies in delivering accurate and timely public health messages to educate the community. Most reporters and other staff of newspapers, TV stations and other media outlets are interested in doing good work that helps people; however, their desire to help will be balanced by their need for a timely story that will attract viewers and sell the media product.

To manage these issues and assure that accurate, appropriate, and strategic messages are formulated and delivered to media representatives, Public Health's Communication Manager (or designee) directly manages all media activities.

Procedures

The role of the Communications Manager (or designee):

1. Assess the nature of the request by a reporter or other media representative and log call the in the database.

2. Respond to the request directly or identify the appropriate departmental spokesperson.
3. As necessary, contact the designated spokesperson and work with them to assure appropriate message delivery.
4. Alert Director and other key staff about the nature of press call.
5. Pursue any follow up indicated by the request.

The role of staff receiving media queries directly:

1. Inform the caller that Public Health has a centralized system for handling media queries and that the Communications Manager (or designee) deals with all media queries.
2. Take the reporter's name, media venue (newspaper, TV or radio station), and phone number; and indicate that the Communications Manager (or designee) will call her/him shortly.
3. Call or page the Communications Manager (or designee), providing the necessary contact information for the reporter and briefing the Communications Manager (or designee) on the topic, if known.

Procedures for serving as the Department's spokesperson when requested by the Communications Manager (or designee)

1. Carefully think through the issues being addressed.
2. Identify issue areas that may be sensitive or controversial.
3. Anticipate the kinds of questions that you may be asked by the reporter and plan your answers in advance.
4. Work with the Communications Manager (or designee) to identify (at least) three messages or "sound bytes" that you definitely want to deliver during the interview; write them down and memorize them.
5. Review Public Health's Media Tips Guide for tips on giving interviews.
6. Contact the reporter and arrange an interview time.
7. Email the Communications Manager, describing how the interview went.

Procedures for proposing proactive contact with media representatives (for example, if you want to issue a news release or opinion article about your program or a related issue)

1. Contact the Communications Manager (or designee) about the issue/event as far in advance as possible. (The Communication Manager will facilitate involvement of Director, as indicated.)
2. Provide background materials for Communications Manager.
3. Submit a first draft of a news release or opinion article to Communications Manager for review, comment, and editing.
4. Work with Communications Manager on planning release of the information (for example, identifying appropriate agencies, arranging a news conference).

5. Work with Communications Manager on follow up requested by reporters.